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THE EFFECT OF LEARNING CENTERS AND INTERACTIVE BULLETIN
BOARDS ON STUDENT VOCABULARY WORD KNOWLEDGE

by
Kristin Marie Schleher

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
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at
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Approved by _____
Advisor

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ABSTRACT

KRISTIN MARIE SCHLEHER
THE EFFECT OF LEARNING CENTERS AND INTERACTIVE BULLETIN
BOARDS ON STUDENT VOCABULARY WORD KNOWLEDGE

2004/05

Dr. Marjorie Madden
Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this project was to determine the effect of different vocabulary strategies on student comprehension. A main focus of the research is to determine the impact of learning centers and interactive bulletin boards in helping students develop word knowledge in the subject area of social studies. This study takes place in a fourth grade general education classroom in an elementary school in southern New Jersey. The research includes qualitative data from student surveys and interviews, and teacher questionnaires and interviews, as well as, the two vocabulary interventions: a learning center and an interactive bulletin board. The students completed pre- and post-assessments for each intervention. The data was analyzed across each of the instruments to determine themes and patterns that were consistent. The results of this study seem to suggest that the use of non-traditional vocabulary strategies can increase students' motivation towards vocabulary instruction.

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Chapter One

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Introduction

“Vocabulary is the glue that holds stories and content together and that facilitates making comprehension accessible for children.”

(Rupley, Logan & Nicholas, 1999)

“The most obvious explanation for the relation [between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension] is that a reader must know the meanings of words- at least most of them- in order to comprehend a text”.

(Herman & Dole, 1988)

Remember back to the times we were in Elementary School. The teacher splits the class into three reading groups: the Bunnies, the Frogs and the Turtles. No matter which group you are in, the common solution to coming across an unfamiliar word is to raise your hand and politely ask the teacher what the word in the text means. The teacher’s response is typically, “You may leave your seat to get a dictionary from the back of the classroom.” Then you look up the word, read the definition, and move on with the rest of the sentence. Even if the definition does not make sense to you, you know you followed your teacher’s suggestion, and therefore, you have done all that you can.

By high school, we develop different strategies as readers and understand that we can probably use the rest of the paragraph or passage to help us figure out an unknown word. When this fails, we realize that there is probably a dictionary in the back of the textbook we were reading. Yet, once we go to the dictionary, find the word, and read the definition, it is often difficult to continue with the rest of the sentence. The bombardment of information, including the main idea of the reading and the new vocabulary words we are trying to internalize often overwhelms us as readers. This makes comprehension difficult and makes the task of reading frustrating.

The Research Problem

Students, both young and old, become frustrated, overwhelmed, and confused by their attempts to uncover meanings of unfamiliar words. Strategies that involve using a dictionary to understand new vocabulary work for some students, but they do not work for all. Research has shown that many strategies, including the dictionary strategy do not always work; indeed, they are far from solutions. "Students often cannot understand the definitions that dictionaries, even children's dictionaries, present" (McKeown, 1993). Children that are trying to find meanings of one word may be caught up by the misunderstanding of another word in the definition. They may also become confused or lose concentration and poorly select a definition for words that have multiple meanings. Further when students work with misinterpreted definitions, the sentences they may create are often misconstrued and frustrating to read (Richek, 2005).

The acquisition of vocabulary can be a difficult and tedious task for adults and children alike. Vocabulary, which has been described as "glue", is the staple of the

comprehension process, has affirmed its prominence in the reading process (Richek, 2005). What, then, does the acquisition of vocabulary mean to a reader?

A reader needs to recognize words as they appear. A reader needs to assign meanings to words. A reader needs to connect the meaning to the words around them. A reader needs to understand ideas. A reader needs to do all of these things simultaneously to become a good reader. How can we effectively teach students to do this? Richek (2005) reports that the more actively and deeply students process words, the better the students will learn them. She emphasizes this fact by explaining that when students are having fun, they are motivated to learn and absorb the knowledge of the words that are around them.

For many students, the most difficult part of school is reading. Research suggests that “children with broad vocabulary knowledge are better able to infer meanings of unfamiliar words in the texts that they read” (Rupley, Logan & Nicholas 1999) With the support of this research, I propose that adapting methods of vocabulary instruction in everyday teaching can help to improve students’ comprehension and retention of content area knowledge. This study is prompted by my interest in determining how vocabulary intervention strategies relate to an increased or decreased level of students’ comprehension. Additionally, I hope to find out what level of teacher involvement is most effective in helping students to increase their vocabulary knowledge.

Research Questions

The core question being examined in this research study becomes: “What are effects of learning centers and interactive bulletin boards on student’s vocabulary comprehension in Social Studies?” In order to better examine this question, it is

important to survey the instructional practices and strategies teachers develop and use in their classroom to help students improve their word knowledge. Consequently, my sub-questions become: How do students typically find meanings for words that they do not recognize? How do they remember the meanings of words they have been exposed too? What strategies do they use to study for vocabulary tests? How can teachers facilitate vocabulary interventions that will result in an improvement of student word knowledge? What are the effects of direct vocabulary instruction compared to a student centered vocabulary instruction? In considering these sub-questions I hope to develop a deeper understanding of the strategies used by students to broaden their vocabulary.

An Overview of Related Research

To gain a better understanding of how vocabulary instruction in the classroom impacts a students' comprehension, I considered research that has been done over the past two decades. My goal was to find literature that addresses teaching strategies, particularly interactive bulletin boards and learning centers on students' vocabulary comprehension. I wanted to find a correlation between the strategies and an increase or decrease in students' word knowledge. While researching I found that the key issues that revolve around vocabulary instruction focus on incidental learning, motivating the student with enriching learning experiences, and the impact vocabulary instruction has on the reading process. I plan on using these three areas to help guide my own study and determine new methods of appropriate vocabulary instruction in the classroom.

As teachers, it is important to determine what types of vocabulary instruction can effectively increase students' vocabulary. Students need to develop the ability to independently use these strategies to learn new words and apply them when they read. It

is the responsibility of teachers to find these strategies and implement them within their classroom. They must determine multiple processes and provide varied exposures to these strategies. Morgan (2003) argues:

“It appears that the following are attributes which can make vocabulary instruction effective for students: exposure to words in meaningful contexts, rich or varied information about each word, establishment of ties between instructed words and students’ own experience and prior knowledge, multiple exposures to words and an active role by students in the word learning process”. (pg 2)

Multiple exposures will allow students to uncover the strategy that works the best for them as readers, and the emphasis that teachers place on the instruction of vocabulary will show students the importance of gaining such strategies as part of their individual reading process.

Importance of the Study & Potential Audiences

Reading, whether for enjoyment, or for purpose, has become a necessary part of everyday life. This study, in particular, is important because it will address a fundamental stage of the reading process and vocabulary knowledge. Vocabulary can be considered the building block of the reading process. This study will impact administrators, teachers, pre-service teachers, students and parents alike. Using pre-existing research and data collected from this study, this research will be helpful to administrators, teachers and pre-service teachers who create curriculum development around vocabulary instruction in the classroom.

Limitations

This research may only be applicable to the grade level where the vocabulary intervention strategy is used. The study is being constructed in hopes of determining what strategies teachers may use with their students from early grades to teach them to be better independent readers, which will in turn enable them to comprehend better. A second limitation to this study is that all students will not be at the same reading level. This will present the challenge of increasing the comprehension level of the class as a whole. Another limitation becomes the fact that all students in the class learn based on their own individualized learning style. The two strategies being implemented to this class may not fit every student's learning style. Fourth, the data collected from this study will be based on the participation of the students; therefore, the strength of the analysis will include the effort the students put into the strategies being implemented. A fifth limitation acknowledges that students in the classroom have predetermined strategies they use when introduced to an unfamiliar vocabulary word. Students may feel frustrated while being asked to explore a new strategy. And a sixth and final limitation to this study is that students may not be willing to discuss how they approach learning vocabulary in the content area. Some students may not even know the strategies that they use while reading.

Organization of the Thesis

This study will address the level of teacher involvement that seems most effective in helping students to increase their vocabulary knowledge. Chapter two provides a review of related literature, and chapter three outlines the design and context of the study.

Chapters four and five present the findings of the study, its implications, and provide suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

“A rich vocabulary means having deeply rooted, flexible understandings of concepts that words represent, powered by a keen ability to use context to tease out important aspects of word meaning and subtle differences in word usage, as well as fired by a fascination with language that creates disposition and motivation to learn new words.” (Brabham & Villaume, 2002, pg. 64)

Vocabulary development is critical to increase students’ levels of comprehension. There are many visions in place about how to use classroom instruction to promote vocabulary growth for all students. This chapter reviews literature and research studies to understand more about current thinking on vocabulary development. The chapter discusses three specific areas: 1) the need for vocabulary development; 2) effective strategies to foster vocabulary learning; and 3) learning styles.

The Need for Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary is a key that unlocks the secrets to comprehension in every content area subject. Social Studies text books, math problems, science experiments, reading stories all incorporate a strong sense of vocabulary, as “a rich vocabulary unlocks a wealth of knowledge and opens up a world to its owner” (Donohue, 2000, pg. 1). This

knowledge incorporates an estimated 88,533 distinct word families in materials for grades three through nine, which “result in a total volume of nearly one half million graphically distinct word types” (Flood et al, 1991, pg. 604). As the list of words continues to grow, these words begin to represent more than just an understanding.

“Vocabulary knowledge is among the best predictors of reading achievement” (Richek, 2005, pg. 414). In order for a student to comprehend what they are reading, they must know the meanings of the words they are reading. Marlow Ediger (1999) offers eight essential reasons for enriching and developing students’ vocabularies in each academic discipline: 1) subject matter and ideas are expressed with more clarity and accuracy, 2) proficiency in the work place might well depend upon individuals having a quality vocabulary, 3) individuals seemingly have more prestige if their listening, speaking, reading and writing vocabularies are adequately developed, 4) greater enjoyment of reading is in the offering if a person has a rich functional vocabulary, 5) vocabulary development is salient in problem solving. 6) conversations carried on with other persons require a rich vocabulary, 7) variety in selecting words to convey accurate meanings is necessary in speaking and writing, and 8) use of diverse terms and concepts in speaking and writing adds variety to quality communication. Based on the importance of vocabulary, teachers must effectively provide instruction that will allow students to develop a larger base of word knowledge.

As stated earlier, children come across close to one half million words from grades three through nine. Further research examining vocabulary estimates that children learn approximately 3,000 new words meanings per year (Pilgrim, 2000). This research also shows that although the students learn new words, many of these words do not

initially become part of the student's reading vocabulary. This research suggests the need for vocabulary instructional strategies to help children learn to internalize new words.

The Effect of Vocabulary on Comprehension

Since the earliest investigations of reading comprehension skills, researchers in reading have found that knowledge of word meanings has a strong relationship to reading comprehension skill (Stahl, 1986). Although this research seems dated, it seems to suggest that understanding the relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension has become increasingly important with the changes in the field of education.

Research continues to explore the direct relation between vocabulary knowledge and student comprehension, and argues that a student's vocabulary knowledge will lead to a greater understanding of the text they are reading. Thus, teaching children how to improve their vocabulary skills only helps to improve elements of literacy (Donohue, 2000). Further, it has been proven that children with broad vocabulary knowledge are better able to infer meanings of unfamiliar words in the texts that they read (Rupley, Logan, & Nicholas, 1999). Children with a broader vocabulary base are able to connect new and unfamiliar words to pre-existing words that they do recognize to help them uncover new meanings. Vocabulary is an extremely important principle of learning, and it is important for teachers to recognize how much influence a strong vocabulary will have in comprehension of every content area subject.

Effective Strategies to Foster Vocabulary Learning

Students need strategies to internalize vocabulary so that it may connect with their everyday life. Teachers need to provide a variety of instructional techniques to make sure

they are reaching the instructional goals of all students. Research demonstrates that the goal of vocabulary instruction is to model strategies that students may use to figure out unfamiliar vocabulary words independently. (Donohue, 2000) The students will then apply these strategies independently to increase their individual knowledge.

“It’s Monday morning. The teacher distributes a list of vocabulary words to the student. The teacher reviews the words with the students who must look up each word in the dictionary, write its definition, and then write an original sentence using that word. Friday morning arrives and it’s time for the test. The teacher pronounces each word. The student must write each word, write the definition, and probably a sentence using the word” (Misulis, 1999, pg. 25).

This short vignette sounds way too familiar. This is the traditional vocabulary instruction that many of us are used to receiving. The problem with an approach like this is that after one week of doing it, the students involved in the instruction become so tired of the repetition and the boring delivery of the lesson that they gain nothing more than practice at memorizing for the Friday test. Many of these words would never become internalized by a child. “In order for words to be truly learned, that is to be used and committed to long-term memory, they must be reinforced many times in meaningful ways” (Misulis, 1999, pg. 25). In most situations, this is easier said than done. Teachers are constantly looking for strategies to make learning vocabulary more enticing for students.

Teachers often try to stay away from the traditional methods of teaching vocabulary that include giving a word, looking it up in the dictionary, and placing it in a

sentence. Research has found that students can not improve their vocabulary knowledge through this kind of instruction (Ediger, 1999). Vocabulary learning needs to engage students and it needs to be fun. “Objectives pertaining to vocabulary development need to stress securing the interests of pupils in ongoing lessons and units of study” (Ediger, 1999, pg. 7). With this being said, if students don’t have an interest in learning something then they will not learn it.

Vocabulary instruction needs to make an impact on a student so that they can find purpose in what they are studying. Every student learns at his or her own pace, and every student learns differently. Vocabulary is no different in that one strategy that works in one classroom may not work in another. Teachers need to find what kinds of strategies work best for their students.

Research has found several of these strategies that work to improve vocabulary comprehension in the classroom. According to Misulis’ study, teachers should select vocabulary words for special instructional emphasis by considering three basic criteria: 1) the content being studied, 2) the students in the class, and 3) the time that is allotted for the particular material (1999). This makes it important for teachers to pre-plan and pre-organize material that they are working with. Teachers need to look at the content materials that they are studying prior to introducing it with their students.

Secondly, this research suggests that teachers include the students’ prior knowledge, as this helps students connect the new material to some knowledge that they already know (Misulis, 1999). Considering prior knowledge also helps them to internalize the information and adds to the level of comprehension they can attain.

The third suggested strategy focuses on a teacher's instruction and how it contributes to students learning in the different content areas. The teacher must identify the skills a student needs to acquire the meaning of unfamiliar words. This includes any lesson that will review, instruct, or reinforce (Misulis, 1999). This develops individual learning skills that can help students achieve word understanding through independent instruction.

The fourth strategy suggests that teachers must address ways that students may make associations among vocabulary that are presented to them (Misulis, 1999). This is important because it associates vocabulary instruction with making connections to the meanings of words. This helps students to organize their word knowledge, and makes uncovering unfamiliar words in the future an easier task.

Suggestion five is to develop and use vocabulary reinforcement activities in content instruction (Misulis, 1999). This is important for the emphasis of making vocabulary instruction fun. The more engaging the lesson the more committed a student will be. This helps to eliminate rote memorization and makes students more inclined to internalize the material.

Misulis (1999) notes as the final suggestion, that initiating vocabulary development at the beginning of classroom instruction will help to develop and reinforce word meanings throughout the instruction. This shows how extremely important it is for teachers to be organized and have pre-organized materials ready for instruction.

Direct instruction has also been proven to be an effective strategy for students to develop word meaning. "It can make significant difference in a student's overall vocabulary, and is critical for those students who do not read extensively" (Richek, 2005,

pg. 414). This suggests that when a teacher leads students through background vocabulary, they will have a better chance at successfully reading a text that is presented to them. As a teacher leads a lecture or discussion on important vocabulary, a word that was once unfamiliar becomes familiar, and the student is able to explore its meaning. This familiarity helps students to internalize the meaning of vocabulary, which will allow them to address the words when they are part of instruction.

Other research suggests that direct may not be as impressive when it comes to instruction of vocabulary. Herman & Dole (1988) report that students acquire knowledge of a great numbers of words incidentally and that direct instruction accounts for relatively few. This contrast of ideas results from the wide variety of research done on the effects of vocabulary instruction.

Learning Styles

The methods of instruction described above must incorporate the learning styles of all students in the classroom. Students learn in different ways, and it is most important for teachers to teach to a wide variety of learning styles. Howard Gardiner (1999) organized these learning styles in eight distinct multiple intelligences. They include: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, musical/rhythmic, bodily kinesthetic, naturalistic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. These intelligences are characteristic of at least one learner in every classroom. Gardiner contends that every child learns in his or her own way. Consequently, teachers must teach to a variety of styles in order to provide instruction for each student in the classroom. Vocabulary instruction is no different. A teacher must provide fundamental vocabulary instruction to meet the needs of every student in the classroom.

Summary

A rich vocabulary is critical to a student's level of comprehension. Students who understand the words that are presented to them in a selection will have a higher chance of comprehending what they are reading. Students cannot be expected to learn vocabulary on their own. Although, research has shown that students pick up a great deal of vocabulary words through incidental learning, the remaining vocabulary words a student must be exposed to and internalize are presented throughout the school day. Thus, the need for vocabulary development is undeniable. Students must be taught strategies to use when they are exposed to an unfamiliar word. A teacher is responsible for creating and using strategies that will foster vocabulary learning in the classroom. It is the responsibility of the teacher to determine what vocabulary strategies will be used in the classroom and how the students in the room are responding to them. Every student in every classroom learns at a different pace through a different teaching technique. It is the responsibility of the teacher to make vocabulary instruction accessible to all children in the classroom.

This review was based on previous research and case studies, and has shown the critical elements that may be related to this study. The focus of this study is to analyze vocabulary instruction in one particular fourth grade class and compare it to the research that has just been discussed. This research study is intended to provide further information that supports the importance of vocabulary development to a student's level of reading comprehension.

Chapter Three

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of the context of the study. This chapter also discusses the research design and methodology of the study, including the participants and the data collection instruments. It describes the procedures used to collect the data and the method of data analysis.

The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of different vocabulary strategies on students' comprehension. A main focus is to determine the impact of two activities (a learning center and an interactive bulletin board) in helping students to internalize content-specific vocabulary. This research argues: a) any approach that involves active student participation produces the most substantial achievements in individual student comprehension and b) students who are exposed to daily teaching strategies that facilitate their individual learning style benefit more than students who are instructed using direct instruction.

Context

School

The site of the present study is in an elementary school in a large middle to lower middle class district in Camden County, New Jersey. The school employs forty teachers,

in addition to other support staff including one-on-one aids, cafeteria and custodial staff, and main office attendants that all work together to meet the needs of the approximately eight hundred and fifty students. There are two on-site administrators, a full-time Principal and a part-time Vice Principal. They oversee and conduct daily operations, which help the school meet the state and community expectations.

Classroom

The particular setting for this study takes place in a fourth grade, general education classroom. The ratio between the teacher and students is two teachers to twenty-five students. The class is lead by a head teacher and a student teacher. The student teacher is the teacher researcher mentioned in this research. In this particular classroom, the means of vocabulary instruction prior to this study were based on traditional, direct instruction. The teacher determined, subject by subject, which vocabulary words were important. Prior to a lesson the teacher developed a class discussion and explored the meanings of the words. The class was required to write the definitions of the words in their notebooks. At times, the teacher distributed a list of words and definitions for the students to cut and paste into the same notebook. The teacher would use this technique to create a variety of assignments. The introductory vocabulary discussion was based on student participation and teacher lecture. The students were expected to follow along with the discussion, and with whatever visual the teacher provided. The classroom used the Harcourt Brace series for science, social studies, grammar, and reading, and the Silver Burdett Ginn series for Mathematics.

Participants

There were twenty-five fourth grade students, ranging from the ages of eight to ten years old who were invited to participate in this research study. The students were placed in a general education classroom of a mixed ability. The class was of middle to middle low socioeconomic class. There were twelve girls and thirteen boys that participated in the study. Each student received a letter prior to the start of my placement as the student teacher and researcher at the Elementary School. The letters stated that any parent who had hesitations about the study could contact the teacher researcher or the head teacher for further explanations. All students were invited to participate in the study.

Methodology

This research follows qualitative procedures as defined in Creswell, 2003. “Qualitative inquiry employs different knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis” (pg. 179). The research takes place in a natural setting, which in this study involves the teacher researcher conducting research in the classroom. The research also uses multiple methods of data collection including observations, participant (student) participation, interviews, and surveys. “Qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured” (pg. 181). Accordingly, throughout the study, I make personal assessments of the data being collected, which will include my own perspective and evaluations. The research study provides qualitative data, including a survey and interview of the students. The research will also provide a questionnaire and interviews of the teachers. Data is collected that depicts strategies the students use when decoding and finding the meaning of unfamiliar words.

Student Survey

The student survey is a one page, two-sided questionnaire that the students filled out at the beginning of my student teaching placement. I created the survey based on questions that I had about individual student vocabulary recognition and learning. Each survey was identical and the students received an unlimited amount of time to complete it. Comments were kept confidential throughout the research.

Table 1 Student Survey

Student Survey-Vocabulary and Study Skills
1. Have you ever participated in a learning center in any of your classrooms?
A. Yes B. No
2. Have you ever participated in an interactive bulletin board in any of you classrooms?
A. Yes B. No
3. How do you feel about using learning centers in your classroom?
A. Excited B. Nervous C. Doesn't change the way I feel D. Never have used them
4. How do you feel about using interactive bulletin boards in your classroom?
A. Excited B. Nervous C. Doesn't change the way I feel D. Never have used them
5. How do you figure out a vocabulary word that is unfamiliar?
A. ask the teacher B. use a dictionary C. skip it D. don't know
6. How do you study vocabulary words when you have a quiz or test?
A. make flashcards B. read my notes C. study w/ someone at home D. don't study
7. Are you confident that you will remember the meaning of a word after the test?
A. always remember B. mostly remember C. sometimes remember D. never remember

Table 1 is a replicated version of the student survey. The questions relate to strategies used to decode and find meaning for unfamiliar words. It also looks at ways

that students connect a word to the meaning and ways students teach themselves to remember newly learned vocabulary words. Participants were also asked about different ways they teach themselves vocabulary words, and strategies they have to remember the words for quizzes and tests. Another section of survey inquired about the experiences the students have had using learning centers and interactive bulletin boards. The final questions were related to ways a teacher helped them learn vocabulary words.

At the end of the survey, the students indicated whether or not they would like to discuss the results with the teacher-researcher at a later time. The students indicate by circling "yes" or "no" in response to the question, and they wrote additional comments if they desired.

Teacher Questionnaire

Table 2 Teacher Questionnaire

<p>1. I use learning centers to help create hands-on experiences for my students:</p> <p>A. all the time B. Some of the time C. Not as much as I would like D. Never</p> <p>2. I use interactive bulletin boards to help create hands-on experiences for my students:</p> <p>A. all the time B. Some of the time C. Not as much as I would like D. Never</p> <p>3. I use creativity and try new strategies in allowing my students to use hands-on learning experiences to make learning more meaningful:</p> <p>A. all the time B. Some of the time C. Not as much as I would like D. Never</p> <p>4. Would you be willing to set up an interview dealing with vocabulary instruction in your classroom?</p> <p>A. Yes B. No C. N/A</p> <p>5. Would you be willing to set up an interview dealing with the use of learning centers in your classroom?</p> <p>A. Yes B. No C. N/A</p> <p>6. Would you be willing to set up an interview dealing with the use of interactive bulletin boards in your classroom?</p> <p>A. Yes B. No C. N/A</p>

The teacher questionnaire was designed to help collect qualitative data from the teachers with whom I worked. As shown in table 2, it includes interview questions to determine what kind of planning and what kinds of strategies teachers use while teaching vocabulary words to students.

Interactive Bulletin Board

The third instrument involved the creation and implementation of an interactive bulletin board. This bulletin board was designed to allow students to independently or collectively study an area of the Social Studies curriculum. Social Studies was chosen based on the high frequency of unfamiliar vocabulary introduction at the fourth grade level. The bulletin board was setup in the hallway, next to the classroom with equal access to all students in the classroom. The teacher put up the board during the month of February to celebrate Black History Month. The bulletin board was composed of pictures of famous African Americans and information pertaining to their accomplishments in American History. The purpose of the bulletin board was for students to interact either individually or collectively to research specific individuals. The students were individually assigned a specific famous African American to report and orally present information to their classmates in celebration of this February holiday.

Learning Center

The fourth instrument was designed in the form of a learning center. I created and set up the center prior to a unit of study on immigration. The learning center was situated in a small, open area of the classroom, to which all students had easy access. I assembled the center prior to the start of the unit, and gave students one week to visit and explore the center.

Teacher Researcher Journal

Throughout the study, I created a teacher researcher journal as a third source of data. I recorded information in a teacher researcher (field) journal that I continued to use throughout my placement to include ideas, questions and data that was presented to me. This helped me to uncover and record different strategies that individual learners used on an independent level when relating to a new or unknown vocabulary word. It included both observations and a hand analysis of data collecting through interviews.

Research Timeline

Research for this study was collected for several weeks within a three month period during the second half of the school year. The study was conducted within the classroom during the Social Studies and recess period, and during any free time the students had at the end of morning work time and seatwork time. The intervention included the implementation of one interactive bulletin board and one learning center on instructional materials in the fourth grade Social Studies curriculum.

Before any implementation, I handed out an informational letter to all my students and parents introducing myself, and explaining the philosophy and goal of my research. I explained that the confidentiality of all research will be preserved the length of the study and that no names will be used in the publication. I used the survey and interviews to learn more about the students I was working with, as a teacher researcher, as well as the teachers that I was collaborating with during the length of my placement.

Before distributing the survey, I created a class list of all the students in the class. The twenty-five names were recorded and they were checked off as they completed the survey. This ensured that all students had completed the questionnaire before any

implementation of instruments three and four. The survey was completed first thing in the morning on a specific day that was feasible for the teacher researcher and the co-operating teacher. Upon completion of the survey, the students put the questionnaire in a manila envelope, sealed it and handed it directly to the teacher researcher. After all the surveys had been collected, the researcher met with eleven of the students to discuss (in further detail) their responses about their experiences with learning centers and interactive bulletin boards.

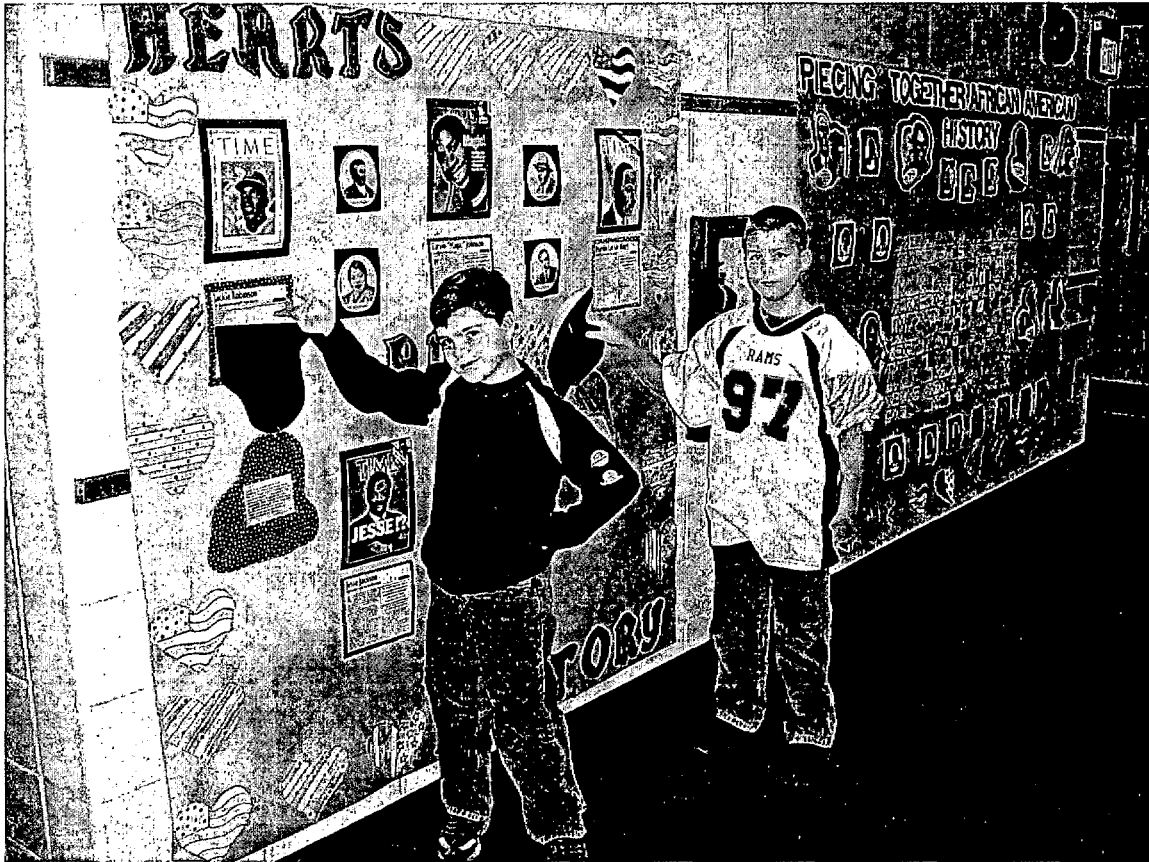
Within the same week, the researcher scheduled interviews with four other teachers within the fourth grade. Two of them were General Education teachers, one was a Special Education teacher and one was a Special Area teacher. The interviews were one-on-one, between the researcher and the teacher, and they were scheduled for a convenient time after school. The interviews were very conversational in that the researcher did not want to make the teachers nervous about participating. I wanted to hear about strategies other teachers used while teaching vocabulary, and about experiences they have had with using learning centers and/or interactive bulletin boards as part of their instruction. The researcher decided to take notes during the interviews, rather than using a tape recording device. After the interview, the notes were placed in a manila envelope and filed away with the other research. I recorded some of the notes into my field notebook (without any reference to whom they were from), because I felt they would be helpful for my continued research.

I created the design for the interactive bulletin board on Black History Month. It consisted of hand-made and store bought items that allowed for a bright, vibrant design that was user-friendly and informational. The design incorporated participation from the

students so that they would feel like a partner in its creation. The students had colored and cut patterns to replicate a quilt, to show the connection between all the famous African Americans. They also designed and colored red, white and blue hearts to associate Black History Month with Valentine's Day and President's Day.

Photograph 1

Interactive Bulletin Board



The researcher then created the names of individual African Americans that she wanted to include in the study of Black History Month. She collected twenty-five names ranging from American History to the present. She wrote the names on popsicle sticks and allowed each student to pick at stick at random. The name that was on the stick selected was the name of the specific person the child would be researching. Once all twenty-five sticks were handed out, the researcher directed the students to put their names

on the opposite side of the stick. This would ensure that no participant would forget who they had chosen. The researcher then called up each student and recorded the name of the African American on their popsicle stick. I allowed the student to keep the stick as a reminder of their famous individual. The students also wrote the name of the individual in their homework notebook.

Before I displayed the bulletin board, I had the students separate their desks into testing order. The researcher then handed out a pre-assessment for the students to take prior to any instruction on these famous African Americans. The assessment listed twenty of the thirty African Americans. The students had to read the name of the individual, and write a complete sentence depicting who the individual was and what they had accomplished in their lifetime. The students had as much time as they needed, and students who finished early were allowed to work on seatwork. When the students were finished, they brought their papers to the teacher researcher and placed them in a manila envelope to be filed away with the rest of the research data.

The students were then given a brief set of instructions, as well as an example project. The teacher researcher had selected thirty African Americans to be honored on the interactive bulletin board: "Piecing Together African American History: Hearts and Heroes". I gave an example that included a female African American that was displayed on the board. It showed the students how they could use the pictures and information about the person to learn the individual's accomplishment. The teacher showed how many of the individuals were connected through either time period or goals they had worked to accomplish. I showed them how they could use all the materials, even

information on other African Americans, to aid in their understanding of their own famous person.

The students were given seven days to use the bulletin board. It was displayed in the hallway so that other teachers and students could see what they had created and how they were using it to familiarize themselves with important vocabulary for their study of Black History Month. The students were given one individual to concentrate on because it was a new strategy in the classroom, and the teacher researcher did not want to overwhelm the students with multiple vocabulary selections.

At the conclusion of the interactive bulletin board period, the students completed another assessment (identical to the pre-assessment), as a post-assessment follow-up. I followed the same procedure as before to ensure the confidentiality of the grades. Based on the feedback I got from the students, I had them use the information they researched to create reports that they presented to the rest of their classmates.

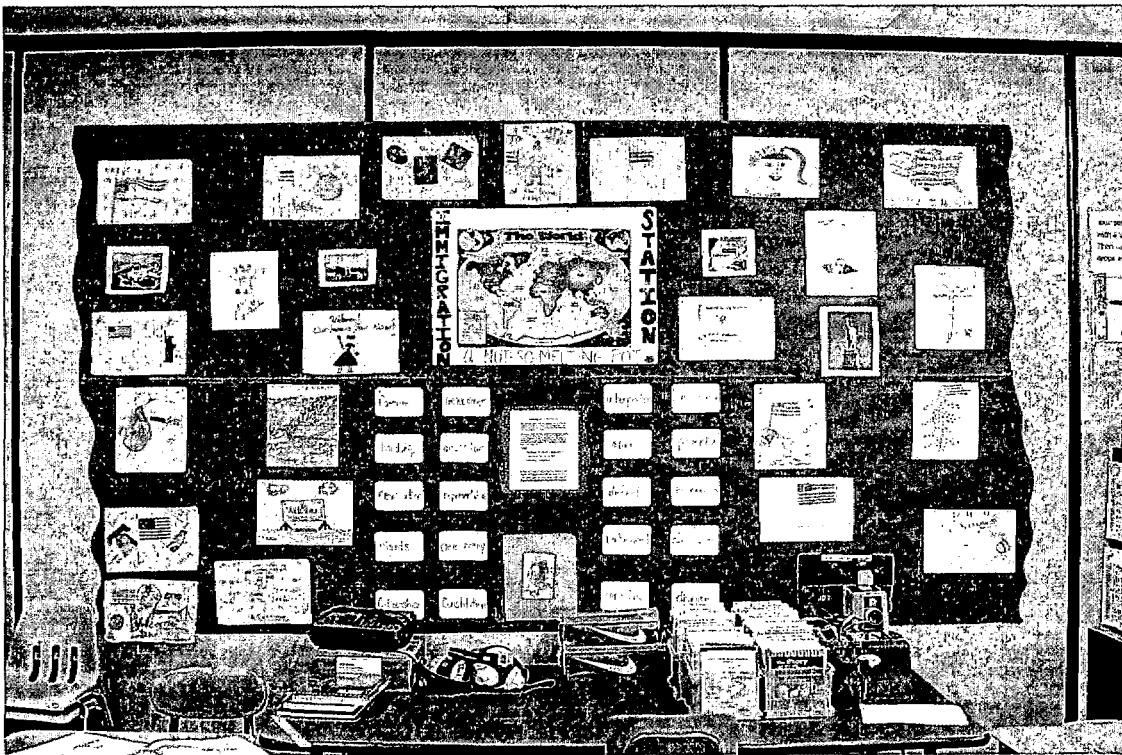
The fourth instrument used in this research was a learning center to introduce a unit of study on immigration. The learning center was called "The Immigration Station", and it allowed for students to interact and explore different aspects of immigration, including reasons why immigrants came to America and different customs and cultures that they brought with them.

The students were given a pre-test to determine their individual knowledge on immigration before the implementation of the learning center. The students followed the same procedure as in instrument three as they completed the pre-test on vocabulary words that could be associated with immigrants and immigration.

After the completion of the pre-test, the teacher researcher established an area in the classroom for collected materials including books, pictures, articles, a list of websites, etc. The center was located next to the classroom computer, and the students were able to use the computer with the permission of the teacher. The students were able to use the learning center on the same basis as the interactive bulletin board, which included any free-time that they had during the school day.

Photograph 2

Learning Center



I used my field notebook to observe the students as they used Immigration Station. I recorded how many times students were using the resources and I measured the level of confidence and motivation they seemed to have while using it. The students had the opportunity to explore a wide variety of activities with the ultimate goal of completing an Immigration Dictionary of all the terms that were displayed on the

learning center. The teacher gave the students an additional week to complete the dictionary. The due date was given and the teacher created an incentive for any student that completed the dictionary. The teacher created the incentive of a pizza party picnic instead of making the completion of the dictionary worth a Social Studies grade. I did this with the optimism that some students may not take the time to complete the dictionary. I felt that I could use this as an explanation for grades on the post-assessment. I was able to draw this conclusion based on the fact that the words included in the dictionary were similar to the words on the pre- and post-assessments.

At the conclusion of the second week, the students were given a post-assessment (same as the pre-assessment) on the vocabulary words from the learning center and in actuality, the next unit of study I was going to be completing in Social Studies. The procedure of the post-assessment was identical to the other assessments that had been given thus far.

I planned to observe the student confidence and comprehension levels during the instruction of the unit. The basis for this was to see if the impact of the learning center improved students understanding of the key vocabulary words, which would improve their comprehension and confidence throughout the unit.

Data Analysis

The procedures involved in the data analysis include classifying and grouping data into themes and patterns. According to Creswell (2003), “typically throughout the data analysis process ethnographers index or code their data using as many categories as possible” (pg. 203). As I continued to collect data, I looked for emerging themes and identifiable events. As discussed in chapter four, I organize my findings, categorize them

and reevaluate them according to patterns or themes discovered and related to current research.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

As indicated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study is to use a variety of vocabulary instruction strategies to determine an increase or decrease in word knowledge in content area subjects. This chapter describes the data analysis collected from preliminary observations, surveys and interviews. It also discusses and interprets data collected during the implementation of the interactive bulletin board and the learning center.

Student Surveys

After student surveys were collected, I organized the information into several themes. I was able to investigate the information, and create an organizational chart (see Table 1) to help re-evaluate my previous theories. This analysis helped me to understand the exposure that the students have had to interactive bulletin boards and learning centers in the past. I used this to determine how students in my study typically investigate a vocabulary word that is unfamiliar to them, how they study vocabulary words that they need to remember, and how confident they are that they can remember the new vocabulary once they have been tested on it. I developed a better understanding of their feelings about using both interactive bulletin boards and learning centers in the classroom in combination with direct instruction.

Table 3: Student Survey Results

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Student 1	Yes	No	A	A	A	C	D
Student 2	Yes	No	A	D	C	B	D
Student 3	Yes	No	C	D	D	C	D
Student 4	Yes	Yes	A	A	B	A	B
Student 5	Yes	Yes	A	A	B	B	C
Student 6	Yes	No	A	D	B	B	C
Student 7	Yes	No	A	D	B	A	B
Student 8	Yes	No	A	D	B	A	B
Student 9	Yes	No	A	D	A	C	B
Student 10	Yes	No	C	D	D	C	D
Student 11	Yes	No	B	D	D	C	D
Student 12	Yes	Yes	A	A	B	A	A
Student 13	Yes	No	C	D	B	C	C
Student 14	Yes	No	A	D	C	C	C
Student 15	Yes	No	C	D	B	B	A
Student 16	Yes	Yes	B	C	D	A	D
Student 17	Yes	No	C	D	D	B	D
Student 18	Yes	No	A	D	A	C	D
Student 19	Yes	Yes	A	A	A	B	C
Student 20	Yes	Yes	A	A	B	C	B
Student 21	Yes	No	A	D	B	C	B
Student 22	Yes	No	C	D	D	B	C
Student 23	Yes	Yes	A	A	A	B	B
Student 24	Yes	No	A	D	C	B	C
Student 25	Yes	No	C	D	D	B	C

Student Survey Results

The results of this student survey seem to suggest that students in the fourth grade classroom have had, at one time or another, the opportunity to work with a learning center (column 1). This information was important to determine how well the implementation of the alternative vocabulary activity would work in this particular classroom. The results of the survey also suggest that eighteen out of the twenty-five students have never been exposed to an interactive bulletin board (column 2). As a teacher researcher, I took this into consideration during the planning of the interactive bulletin board (see the Methodology section in chapter 3). Columns 3 and 4 relate to the feelings that the students had about using an interactive bulletin board and learning center

in the classroom. Sixteen out of the twenty-five students were excited about using learning centers in the classroom. Two students felt nervous when asked to participate in a learning center, and seven claimed that using a learning center doesn't change the way they are felt. Based on these responses, I was able to determine that introducing and implementing a vocabulary learning center was not going to create classroom anxiety. The two students were asked to interview about their feelings of nervousness. Their comments are discussed in the next section of the analysis: student interviews (student 11, student 16). In column four, the data suggests that a majority of the students in this class had never been exposed to an interactive bulletin board. Seventeen of the twenty-five students claimed to have never used one. Seven out of the twenty-five surveyed that they were excited. One of those seven students also responded that even though they had never used an interactive bulletin board, they would feel excited about using it in the classroom. This student (student 1) was also interviewed (see student interviews). The data seems to suggest that although seventeen students had never used interactive bulletin boards, no student responded that they would be nervous about using one in the classroom.

The remaining questions in the survey allowed me to determine vocabulary strategies that were used by the students in the classroom. Question five asked students how they figure out a vocabulary word that is unfamiliar to them. The question did not give a specific context, but asked generally speaking. Five out of the twenty-five students surveyed responded that they ask the teacher what the word means. Ten students use a dictionary when they come across an unfamiliar word, and three students responded that they would just skip the unfamiliar word. Seven of the twenty-five

claimed that they do not know what they do. I asked five of these students, based on a random selection, if they would discuss reasons why they selected, “skip it” and “don’t know” as their answer. Four of the five students (students 2 & 14 and student 10 & student 17) agreed, and the results are discussed in the section below in the student interviews. Column 7 represents the students’ survey answers for how they study vocabulary words for a quiz or test. Five students reported that they would most likely make flashcards with the word and definition; ten students said that they would just read through their notes and refresh themselves with the definitions; ten students said they would study orally with someone at home; and zero students in the classroom said that they would not study. I used this information to determine the importance of student comprehension and achievement for each student. This question seemed to support the notion that the students cared about internalizing the meaning of the vocabulary words.

The final questions of the survey looked into whether or not the way a student studied helped them to be confident that they would remember the word and be able to use it outside of the assessment. Question 7 asked if the students were confident that they would remember the meaning of the word after the test. Only two students out of the twenty-five responded that they always remember the meaning of the word after the assessment. Seven students responded that they would mostly remember the meaning; eight students reported that they might sometimes remember and eight students responded that they would never remember. I was surprised at the students’ honesty, but research seems to support that the students are only memorizing the meanings of the vocabulary words for the test. They are not internalizing the meaning of the word and are not confident that they are learning the meaning of the words. This seems to suggest that

the current means of vocabulary instruction in the classroom does not allow for more than half of the class to confidently internalize the meaning of vocabulary words presented to them.

Student Interviews

I used the initial student surveys to determine the students' point of view relating to vocabulary and the identification of finding meanings of words. I also found a consensus concerning the use of nontraditional vocabulary activities with the classroom. To corroborate survey findings, I interviewed ten of the students in the classroom. Three of the students were selected at random. Two students (student 11 & 16) were selected based on their answer for question 3 to determine why they feel nervous about using learning centers in the classroom. One student (student 1) was asked to interview based on their answer (excited) to using interactive bulletin boards in the classroom, despite never using one before. Four students (student 2 & 14) and (student 10 & 17) were asked to interview as to their answers to question five. Student 2 and 14 responded that they would "skip" an unfamiliar vocabulary word and students 10 and 17 responded that they "don't know" what they do when they come to an unfamiliar word.

"When I get to find things out for myself, I think I am able to remember them more," one student responded to an introductory question about learning centers and interactive bulletin boards. "I hate vocabulary, but I think it would be fun if we got to partner up and work on it in a learning center," another student added. The interviews were conducted individually first; then, the students participated in a small group discussion. The answers given in the one-on-one interviews were consistent with the responses in the group discussion. I concluded that vocabulary is not something that

students like to learn. They felt that being exposed to new words was difficult, especially when the words were in text. The students said it was easier to find meaning for words that they did not know when the teacher was lecturing or reading from their Social Studies textbook. They commented, "My teacher normally helps us out with words we don't know." Another student added, "I have never been able to use a learning center to help me with vocabulary. I have definitely used them for Math and it has helped me learn my math facts." This particular student was asked if they thought using a learning center for exploring or studying vocabulary would help to learn and remember important vocabulary words. The student responded, "I never thought about that, but yes, I think it would. If it didn't, it still would be fun!"

Two other students disagreed with the idea that learning centers are fun, and both agreed that they had their hesitations about using learning centers in the classroom. "I remember the last time I had to work in a learning center. The teacher gave the directions, but when I didn't understand, I felt like it was all on me to teach myself." I questioned the student to see if they were most confused with the directions of what to do at the learning center or if they didn't understand what they were learning in the learning center. The student tried to recall, and responded, "I think I remember not understanding the directions, because I liked what we were learning about, I just didn't know what to do, you know?" This interview in particular showed me how valuable it is to have clear and straightforward directions. This student didn't have a problem with using a learning center; he had a problem with his last experience because the teacher had not asked to clarify any questions on directions. This is a topic that comes up in the teacher interviews section as well.

Another student (student 1) was asked to discuss why she was excited to use an interactive bulletin board in the classroom even though she had never used one before. The student simply responded, "It sounds like fun. I hate when we do the same thing everyday. I can't be bothered, it is too boring." This student was very cut and dry in her interview, and she consistently discussed how she likes to have fun in the classroom and hates when things become routine. I questioned the student about the importance of routine and being able to always understand ahead of time what a teacher is expecting of her. Student 1 agreed, but she said, "It would be nice to do something different, at least every once in awhile." She compared learning concepts and becoming actively involved to time she spends at the Franklin Institute, a children's science center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. "I think of all the interactive bulletin boards I have seen there; I have learned so many vocabulary words from them. I do wish my teachers could do something like that in our class." This interview clearly supports the research of Richek (2005), who argues that "words are typically learned gradually, and the more actively and deeply students process words, the better they learn them" (pg. 414-415). Richek also suggests that activities using words in games, connecting words, and manipulating words creatively result in excellent student learning. Similarly, we learned from student 1 that when students have fun with learning, they are more motivated to explore and learn.

Teacher Questionnaire Results

The data collected from the teacher questionnaires was used to gather information on any exposure that the students may have had to using learning centers and/or interactive bulletin boards. Once the teachers completed the questionnaires, the information was

classified based on the teachers' responses. The teacher questionnaire can be found in chapter 3 under the Methodology section. The results are below in Table 4.

Table 4: Teacher Questionnaire Results

Teacher 1	A	C	A
Teacher 2	C	D	A
Teacher 3	B	B	A
Teacher 4	A	A	A
Teacher 5	A	D	A
Teacher 6	A	C	A
Teacher 7	B	D	A

After analyzing the information above, I was able to determine that all of the teachers have used a learning center in their classrooms. Four of the teachers use them all the time compared to the responses about the use of interactive bulletin boards in the classroom. The data in column 3 seems to suggest that the teachers do create hands-on experiences for their students. Each teacher that participated in the questionnaire agreed that they valued creativity and new strategies in order to provide students with hands-on learning experiences and more meaningful learning. This information informed subsequent teacher interviews.

Teacher Interviews

Teacher interviews focused on vocabulary instruction and strategies used to help students create real life connections to the meaning of the words. Questions were also asked about learning centers and interactive bulletin boards and how they are beneficial to this strategy.

"Vocabulary is so important to everything we do in the classroom, but it is one of those things that there is no one way to do it," the teacher continued to explain that because every student (in her classroom) learns differently, she needed to have multiple

strategies going at one time. “It is an exhausting task, but any teacher who wants to achieve the objective of their lesson knows that, and works through it.” Another teacher agreed about the amount of instructional strategies that are out there. She commented, “there are so many things that a teacher tries to do, but the amount of time available is what often times forces me to stick to what I know works.” I asked this particular teacher what it means for a student to develop a rich vocabulary. She said that “it is something that is internalized, something that students can manipulate on their own, and that they can use in context.”

Other research supporters (Brabham and Villaume, 2002) agree with these statements. Studies argue that “there are many visions in place about how to use classroom practices to promote vocabulary growth for all students, but teachers do not always have adequate resources for developing alternative activities to make vocabulary instruction more productive and powerful” (pg. 264). My interpretation here is that Brabham and Villaume are referring to the importance of resources reiterated by teacher 2’s comments about the availability of time to create such activities. Brabham and Villaume (2002) also emphasize the meaning of a rich vocabulary, arguing that it is, “a deeply rooted, flexible understandings of concepts that words represent, powered by a keen ability to use context to tease out important aspects of word meaning and subtle differences in word usage, as well as fired by a fascination with language that creates disposition and motivation for learning words” (pg. 265).

Several teachers responded to this definition, agreeing that vocabulary is by far the backbone of a student’s education. Each of them understood the importance of vocabulary and of creating real life learning experiences for each child. I asked each of

the teachers how these two “important” aspects of education are related. I wanted to know how vocabulary instruction and real life experiences could be described in each of their classrooms. The teachers responded with comparable responses. “Vocabulary is so important and it is one of those things that you don’t want to take chances on. It is one of those things that you find what works for the students that are in your class and you go with it”. Another teacher added that in her classroom she understands the needs of her students and she knows that they need a variety of vocabulary lessons in order to get the most out of any lesson. “I typically present vocabulary in a variety of ways, and I like to be flexible while handing out assignments”. As the teacher explained this in more detail, she discussed the idea of handing out different projects that go along with the vocabulary terms. She explains, “One week, I’ll give my students a choice of different assignments and allow them to pick what they would like to do as a reinforcement. At other times, I’ll assign one assignment in particular, but I’ll options throughout the week”.

Interactive Bulletin Board

The pre-assessments and post-assessments of the interactive bulletin board were charted to determine the impact of the implementation of the interactive bulletin board on the students’ vocabulary comprehension. I looked at the data collectively to compare the pre- and post-assessments to understand how the implementation of the interactive bulletin board impacted students’ comprehension. This was intended to demonstrate the effect of the bulletin board on each student’s comprehension score.

The pre-assessment scores represent a comprehension score prior to working with the interactive bulletin board. The post-assessment results demonstrated the students’ comprehension levels after the interactive bulletin board had been created and used

within the classroom. Comparisons of the data collected from the pre- and post-assessments suggest greater vocabulary after the intervention.

Table 5: Interactive Bulletin Board Results

Student	Pre-Assessment Scores	Post-Assessment Scores
Student 1	0/15	0/15
Student 2	0/15	6/15
Student 3	5/15	5/15
Student 4	6/15	11/15
Student 5	5/15	9/15
Student 6	1/15	5/15
Student 7	3/15	6/15
Student 8	3/15	8/15
Student 9	3/15	10/15
Student 10	2/15	5/15
Student 11	3/15	11/15
Student 12	3/15	7/15
Student 13	1/15	4/15
Student 14	2/15	6/15
Student 15	8/15	8/15
Student 16	4/15	6/15
Student 17	3/15	8/15
Student 18	2/15	5/15
Student 19	2/15	3/15
Student 20	6/15	7/15
Student 21	2/15	5/15
Student 22	2/15	6/15
Student 23	5/15	7/15
Student 24	0/15	5/15
Student 25	n/a	3/15

As the teacher researcher, I created the format of the interactive bulletin board and allowed for the students' participation in creating the design. The students were actively involved in drawing and coloring hearts in the designs of American flags to display on our bulletin board. The students were motivated on working on the design of the bulletin board and they felt like co-creators in its use outside our classroom. One student asked, "Are we going to let other classes use our bulletin board?" I answered the student by saying I wasn't sure, and I asked her why she asked. The student contended, "Because

part of me thinks we should because this is cool, but the other part of me says no way because we worked hard on this and it's ours". Initially, when the bulletin board was put up in the hallway, the students commented, "Oh, look, that one is mine," and "Yeah, mine looks great next to yours". The students were elatedly proud of the work they had done on their interactive bulletin board.

The results of the implementation of the interactive bulletin board, as well as the data collected from the pre- and post-assessments seem to suggest that the execution of the bulletin board in the classroom was an effective strategy at teaching vocabulary. Three out of the twenty-five students did not improve their word comprehension scores from the pre- and post-assessment. These three students (student 1, 3 & 15) scored the same score on both assessments. Student 25 could not be considered in this interactive bulletin board because she came into the classroom at the end of the implementation. The results show that the students ranged in improvements from slight progressions to improvements of up to eight total points. Student 9 had a score of 3/15 on the pre-assessment to a score of 10/15 on the post-assessment. Student 11 had a score of 3/15 on the pre-assessment and a score of 11/15 on the post-assessment. The increase in scores suggests that the students increased understanding on the important concepts that the interactive bulletin board was emphasizing. Student 24 had a score of 0/15 on the pre-assessment and maintained a 5/15 on the post-assessment. This was the most impressive score, in my opinion, because this particular student was ecstatic about using the bulletin board. She had no interest in the study of Black History Month prior to the implementation of the bulletin board and then after the students began coloring the hearts and hanging them on the bulletin board, this particular student became fascinated. She

could not wait to start using it, and once it became part of our classroom, she even asked to stay in from recess to work on it.

This student commented, "I never thought I would be so interested in history. I know we have learned about Black History before, but I like being able to see their faces as I am reading about their accomplishments and stuff." "I also like that there are different kinds of information about each person because I particularly like the newspaper articles." Another student added that "it's cool to read about the person from the time they were alive." This particular student was referring to TIME Magazine articles that were available on the interactive bulletin. He adds that "it feels I am there with the person like living through what they are doing."

The implementation of the interactive bulletin board seemed to be a success in our classroom. Some students liked it more than others, but the fact that it helped most students in the classroom to achieve higher vocabulary comprehension scores seems to suggest that it was something that could be used more often.

Learning Center

The learning center, as well as the interactive bulletin board, provided data intended to support the use of both of the vocabulary strategies. Participation in this part of the research was voluntary.

As the researcher, I gave all the students an incentive to participate, assuming that there would still be some students that were not motivated by the reward of a pizza picnic party. The students were asked to visit the learning center and follow the directions that were outlined. I explained the purpose of the center, and gave clear directions as to the different activities that were included. As the teacher researcher, I felt that the directions

were very straightforward, and I wanted to allow the students to explore the materials at their own interest level and pace. I wanted the students to use critical thinking as well as their own interpretation of the materials before asking questions. The purpose of the learning center was to allow the students to explore and research the words on their own or with the peers, and create their own connections to them which would help them internalize the meaning of the newly associated vocabulary words.

The students used resources at the learning center, but they could also use a computer to access the internet and encyclopedias. The students had to use the center on their own time, which meant that they had to visit it when their seatwork was finished or during their recess within the ten designated days (before the unit was set to begin).

The pre-assessments and post-assessments of the learning center were also be compared and charted to determine the impact of its implementation in the classroom. The data was looked at to determine overriding patterns or themes about vocabulary learning as a result of this learning center intervention. Table 6 demonstrates the effect of the learning center on the understanding of the targeted vocabulary words. The improvements are based on the learning center because no other instruction was given (at this time) on immigration.

The data seems to suggest that the learning center did help some students to perform more successfully than the other students who did not participate in the learning center. Other students, however, who did not participate in the learning center, did show improvements on some of the comprehension assessments. The following table will demonstrate the results of the learning center pre- and post-assessments.

Table 6: Learning Center Results

<u>Instrument 4: Learning Center</u>		
Student	Pre-Assessment Scores	Post-Assessment Scores
Student 1	14/18	12/18
Student 2*	11/18	9/18
Student 3*	6/18	8/18
Student 4	18/18	18/18
Student 5	10/18	10/18
Student 6	13/18	15/18
Student 7	11/18	14/18
Student 8*	13/18	13/18
Student 9	18/18	16/18
Student 10*	9/18	12/18
Student 11*	12/18	12/18
Student 12	16/18	18/18
Student 13	12/18	15/18
Student 14	12/18	14/18
Student 15*	17/18	N/a
Student 16*	7/18	8/18
Student 17	10/18	11/18
Student 18*	9/18	9/18
Student 19	6/18	7/18
Student 20	10/18	11/18
Student 21	14/18	14/18
Student 22	10/18	10/18
Student 23	11/18	16/18
Student 24*	9/18	9/18
Student 25	9/18	12/18
* Students that did NOT participate in the learning center. These students took the pre-assessment and post-assessment ONLY.		

Nine out of the twenty-five students chose not participate in the learning center. Student 15 was an exception because he relocated three days into the implementation of the learning center. He had completed the pre-assessment, but there was no data collected on use of the learning center or the post-assessment. Three of the nine students (student 3, 10, & 16) made improvements between the pre-and post-assessment despite not participating in the learning center. The remaining six students either stayed the same or scored a lower comprehension score. Out of the remaining sixteen students that participated, ten students increased their comprehension scores, four students stayed the

same from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment and two students' scores went down. These results seem to suggest that the implementation of the learning center was indeed beneficial to the students' vocabulary achievement.

The learning center results suggest additional evidence because the results were analyzed based on two groups, an experimental group and a control group. The control group consisted of those students who did not participate and complete the learning center. Students in the experimental group found free time during the implementation of the learning center to explore the different activities, stories and manipulatives that were related to the vocabulary terms. These students then handed in their completed Immigration Dictionaries to receive the incentive.

Teacher Researcher Journal

The teacher researcher journal allowed me to compare my observations with current research in the field of vocabulary instruction. I also used the journal to correlate interview results with my classroom observations. As a data source, my teacher researcher journal records my thinking from the beginning to the end of this study. It includes observations and student responses related to vocabulary instruction from a time before I was the teacher through my entire student teaching experience.

Student Response to Vocabulary Prior to this Research

The students in this classroom were very much adjusted to the method of vocabulary instruction that the teacher in the classroom presented prior to my research. The students understood the daily assignments for the week, and they knew exactly what the teacher expected of them. At the beginning of this research, I asked several students about the vocabulary homework that they had to do for a social studies lesson. "We have

to take these words and find the definitions in the chapter. Then we must write the word, underline it and write the definition.” Another student added that the definition must be in a complete sentence. “Yeah, it is really easy, and it doesn’t take much time either.” Another student added, “My mom makes me do it right after school, and I don’t mind because it doesn’t take me a long time, except when she makes me re-copy it when it is sloppy.”

The teacher first previewed the material in the lesson, focusing on keywords. She created a guided reading worksheet and vocabulary check to help the students determine the meaning of the new vocabulary words in context. The students were responsible for writing the word and definition in their Social Studies notebook.

As I observed this process, the students seemed very comfortable with the routine. Some students had trouble because of disorganization; they lost definitions in their notebook, or forgot to complete the assignment before the lesson. A majority of the class was able to complete the work in less than ten minutes. Observed the class during vocabulary lessons, I noticed many of the students were not following along. I monitored the class on occasion and observed students drawing or “doodling” as they called it. There were times I would interject and call specifically on the students that were not paying attention. This was done strictly to get the students focused, but the responses that were given suggested that the students were not learning vocabulary. In one specific example, the teacher asked a student what “persecution” meant. The student explained the term personification that had been discussed during the previous grammar lesson. This specific example was extreme, but it was something that could happen at any particular time when students were not following along with the lesson at hand.

When students are not actively involved in what they are doing, the teacher has no idea of whether or not they are learning any of the presented definitions. A student can be quiet, self-controlled and focused on the front board, but instead of following along with the “routine” vocabulary lesson, the student may be thinking about the sports game they have that evening. I noticed this happening from time to time in the classroom. It was important that we had two teachers in the classroom who monitored the students very closely. The teachers were responsible for calling on students randomly to make sure they were all paying close attention to the lesson.

I asked my co-operating teacher about this, and she commented that it is something that happens all the time. She commented, “As an experienced teacher, you learn how to learn from your students and from what you have been presented in the past. I know the kids in this classroom very well, and I also know the students who are always focused because they raise their hands all day long.” She stated that the students who rarely try to participate are the students you need to focus on. “There will be some students in your classroom that constantly call out answers. Although calling out is against the classroom rules, you still get a better picture of the students who are following along with discussions.” We felt that calling out, despite being against the rules, displayed a students’ eagerness to answer a question.

Another student reaction I noticed was that the students became upset when the teacher asked them to take out their Social Studies vocabulary books. The students never “awed” or “booed” because the teacher made respect a huge part of her classroom, but these students exemplified characteristics that demonstrated they were bored with routine.

I asked a student why they were making faces. The response was, “I really hate this; I never even look at these words again (after they were copied).” Several other students gave similar responses to the same question, and one student even explained the vocabulary routine as “boring”. I understand the positive reasons why a teacher would stick to the same method. It is especially important to keep the routine simple, especially for those students that do have difficulty with organization or with change. At the same time, there were students in this class that were getting nothing out of the vocabulary lesson, because it was “boring” and “stupid”.

The teacher also used other strategies in the classroom, but for the most part they consisted of teacher lecture and student discussion. One lesson in particular seemed to invite student engagement. The teacher would use terms from Social Studies as spelling challenge words, and allow students to explore meanings in a more hands-on way. Students frequently worked in teams to uncover the definition of the word. The activities usually depended on the amount of time the teacher had, but the excitement of the students demonstrated to me that time or no time, this strategy should be used all the time. The kids were communicating and working together. They had smiles on their faces. In one situation, a girl screamed out “Hurry up! Hurry up!” to her teammate who was getting a dictionary. The teacher reprimanded her, but the student called out purely from excitement for what she was doing.

Student Response to Vocabulary throughout Research

I observed this same motivation from the students when I began teaching and explained the implementation of the interactive bulletin board. Initially the students had blank looks on their faces. But, when I explained we were going to be creating it

together, they seemed excited that they were going to help create a bulletin board. "I've always had work on a bulletin board, but I never got to help construct one. This sounds cool." The students showed motivation in creating the bulletin board. This motivation carried over to the actual implementation of the interactive bulletin board. Students exhibited enthusiasm about participating, clearly showing that motivation is an important factor in student success in the classroom (Hancock, 1994).

I observed similar excitement when the kids worked on the different activities in the learning center. The students were engaged in simultaneous activities and some paired up to discuss of what they were doing. "I'm not really into reading the magazine articles, but I love the computer stuff. And the pictures are really cool too; look how old they look." This was a student's response on day 3 of the learning center. The student seemed very focused on what he was doing. Thus, the intervention seemed to engage students, supporting research findings that students who receive instruction with the use of hands-on activities demonstrate higher levels of success when compared with their peers who have been taught without the benefit of hands-on instruction (Blair, 2000).

Summary of Findings

I hoped to find themes or patterns that were consistent throughout this study and several themes did emerge as I analyzed the data sources: 1) the importance of effective vocabulary instruction, 2) the benefits of hands-on, experiential learning versus traditional learning, and 3) the role of student motivation on student vocabulary learning. In chapter 5, I examine these themes and patterns and revisit the current research on vocabulary instruction to make sense of my study.

Chapter Five

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Vocabulary is one of several components of reading, yet it is argued that it is one of the most important factors in student comprehension (Brabham & Villaume, 2002). As students read, they are not able to comprehend the content of a text without a full understanding of the terms involved. Based on the importance of vocabulary knowledge, teachers must find ways to deliberately address vocabulary instruction in the classroom. Teachers must create and maintain a motivation for learning vocabulary, and they must foster a sense of creativity to plan instruction that helps to enhance vocabulary acquisition.

Summary of the Problem

How do students typically find meanings for words that they do not recognize?

How do they find remember the meanings of words they have been exposed to?

What strategies can teachers facilitate to increase student vocabulary knowledge?

(Research Questions, May 2005)

The acquisition of vocabulary is necessary for reading comprehension. Further, vocabulary knowledge is said to be among the best predictors of reading achievement

(Richek, 2005). This research explores ways of helping students to develop a rich vocabulary. Brabham & Villaume (2002) report the estimates of vocabulary acquisition to be roughly 3,000 words per year, a great deal of incidental vocabulary for students to learn. This fact suggests that teachers must concentrate on addressing vocabulary instruction in the classroom. Yet, what strategies should teachers be using in their classroom to address vocabulary instruction more deliberately? As the teacher researcher, I proposed that using strategies that were hands-on and motivating would help students to realize the maximum achievement from vocabulary instruction. Consequently, my study examines the effects of two interventions, and considers their impact on vocabulary learning.

Conclusion

The students involved in this study were engaged and excited when the interactive bulletin board and the learning center became part of their traditional vocabulary instruction. The positive responses of the students and teachers seemed to suggest that the students enjoyed exploring words during each intervention. The creation of hands-on investigations permitted the students to explore vocabulary and content based on their own learning style, and allowed for a greater command of the social studies material being presented. Students who excel in academic confidence and motivation will have a greater opportunity at achieving their highest potential (Tobias, 1995). This study demonstrates that it is no different for vocabulary instruction. Children who understand subject material will regularly perform better than students who are struggling to master the content. Children will have an easier time mastering social studies information with a

sound vocabulary, making it essential for teachers to use more non-traditional methods of teaching vocabulary.

Across this research study there are several consistent themes that were suggested by the data: (1) the importance of vocabulary instruction to successful student learning in content area subjects; (2) the benefits of hands-on, experiential learning; (3) the power of innovative ideas to frequently create student excitement and thus student engagement; and (4) the impact of student motivation on vocabulary learning.

Students acknowledged that learning new vocabulary was important, but it was also often frustrating for them to learn and use new words in everyday life. One student stated, “No matter what I do, I can’t remember the words I am supposed to when I have a test.” This student claimed to study daily with the help of one of his parents. “I know the words all week and then when it comes to the Friday test, I just go blank.” This student also claimed to have difficulty with his spelling words, but said that he keeps trying because “I know that I will not do well on the information presented to me if I can not remember what the key terms mean.”

The teachers overwhelmingly agreed that vocabulary instruction was critical to the success of the students in the classroom. They commented that their students’ comprehension was ultimately going to depend on the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction given prior to reading the text.

Research suggests that many strategies are available to teachers to promote classroom practices to increase the awareness and success of vocabulary instruction (Brabham & Villaume 2002). As seen in this study, the success of a vocabulary lesson (student understanding and application of new words) is often determined by the teacher

and by the participation of the students in the classroom. This understanding of the importance of specific kinds of vocabulary instruction should prompt a teacher to provide instruction that highly engages students and invites participation in order to increase success.

A second theme that was consistently found in this research includes the benefits of hands-on, experiential learning versus traditional learning. Both the teachers and the students unanimously agreed that a lesson that includes an activity or active involvement of the students will result in more motivation towards achievement. Observations throughout this study suggest that students are more excited about participating in a vocabulary lesson when it involves some kind of activity. This was exemplified in chapter four with the example of the traditional vocabulary instruction that was used prior to this research. The children were typically bored with their vocabulary assignments, but when the teacher used the activity where teams competed to find meanings of the words, the students eagerly participated. The students also demonstrated the same excitement when they were able to use the interactive bulletin board and learning center. The students enjoyed the interventions that they considered to be “different”.

Suggesting a third theme, the teachers agreed that the more innovative ideas are what create the most student excitement. One teacher commented, “When students are excited about what they are doing, they are going to put more effort into the lesson...effortlessly.” This teacher believed that it was worth the extra effort by the teacher to create such activities. Another teacher agreed. “I create learning centers for my students to use for extra credit even though only about $\frac{1}{4}$ of my students participate.” This teacher is identifying with the needs of a $\frac{1}{4}$ of her students. There is a difference

between students who are motivated by the vocabulary lessons that are presented to them and those that are not motivated. The students (described in this study) have improved their comprehension of the information presented to them because of teachers' efforts in creating new learning experiences that involve active participation.

The final theme that was identified was the impact of student motivation on vocabulary learning. The example of the learning center from above can also distinguish the importance of student motivation on academic success. The teacher continued to explain that the students (in her classroom) who do participate in the extra credit assignments witness improvements in their grades, but the ones that do not put the effort in, continue to struggle. "I wish more of them (students) had the motivation (to participate) that I have to create them (learning centers)." This suggests that students that are more motivated will do better comprehending information that is presented to them. This teacher might try to use the learning centers as part of the lesson rather than as an extra credit assignment; perhaps student participation would increase if students were exposed to a non-traditional vocabulary lesson.

Student motivation is important to student success, especially in vocabulary instruction, an area that students in this study considered to be "boring". Tobias (1995) states that "the effects of interest adds to an understanding of the impact of intrinsic motivation on learning" (pg 399). As interests appear to be long lasting, a teacher will observe a positive motivation towards learning for long periods of time (Tobias, 1995).

This research study seems to suggest that student motivation concerning vocabulary instruction will determine the level of student engagement, as well as the level of student comprehension. The data suggests that the students who are more

actively involved in a vocabulary lesson perform more confidently and become more excited. This excitement has been found to be a critical factor in creating vocabulary instruction that is rich and successful.

Recommendations and Implications

Based on this research, I believe that teachers must deliberately address vocabulary instruction in the classroom, and address it in particular ways. It is important to determine what classroom strategies will work for the students in the classroom. Children have different learning styles and they all acquire vocabulary at their own pace. It is important to address the diversity in the classroom, not simply follow a traditional, whole class method of vocabulary instruction.

When the students in this study were asked about vocabulary, it was not something that was reported back in an excited or positive way. The popular consensus was that vocabulary was not fun. As the students became involved in the creation of their own vocabulary strategy (the interactive bulletin board), the feelings of the students began to change. As the students began exploring the learning center designed to prepare them for a unit of study, the students became excited and eager for something new, something inventive. The students in this study were motivated by these non-traditional methods of vocabulary instruction.

As a researcher, I recommend that teachers address the needs of all students with a diversity of learning styles. This includes the implementation of a variety of vocabulary instructional strategies. I also recommend that teachers use creativity to incorporate hands-on exploration of vocabulary materials so that students are able to make real-life connections.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study was helpful in understanding the importance of vocabulary instruction in the classroom. Nevertheless, vocabulary instruction remains a large and extremely complex topic. It is necessary for researchers to continue to look at historical research claims and compare these findings to what is happening in today's classrooms. Every teacher and every student is different; consequently it would be helpful to study a larger body of participants and a wider array of instructional practices. The use of vocabulary instruction would benefit from further research. For one reason, as the field of education continues to change, so too will the topic of vocabulary instruction. In order to use the most appropriate strategies and interventions, a continuum of research pertaining to vocabulary instruction is necessary. A final reason why vocabulary instruction would benefit from further research includes the impact of students' vocabulary comprehension on academic success. Based on what we have learned about the impact of vocabulary on student comprehension, it is necessary to continue researching current educational settings and methods of instruction.

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